

A System for Using the WWW and Relational Database Technology to Present Health Information Resources

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The Office of Information Systems (OIS) of the School of Medicine and the Health Sciences Library (HSL) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are collaboratively creating a WWW presentation of health information resources. The resources will include locally mounted and supported databases and full-text titles; selected resources accessible at other sites over the Internet; and LAN and PC-based programs resident at HSL and OIS.

While many institutions have implemented web presentations of similar resources, the approach at UNC-CH is fundamentally different. It uses a database rather than static pages written in HTML. The core of the database is a relational record for each information resource. This record contains elements which have much in common with a cataloging record, such as title and subject headings, but also has imbedded within it active links to such features as "help" and other levels of detail about the resource. Once a record has been created, it is used and acted upon throughout the system by all system features.

The design is unique in function, information manipulation, and presentation and gives the user extensive control over access to the selected resources. The database affords dynamic updating and manipulation of information using underlying searching, filtering, and sorting capabilities. Management of resources is both simplified and enhanced.

The creation and maintenance of a single record has an amplified and distributed effect. Built-in tools allow the use of a set of actions, sorts, and filters which afford the user over 1,500 permutations of information access and presentation. Menued or exploded views of the titles may be easily selected. Filters may be applied which, for example, restrict selection to only full-text resources, only resources with free or open access, or only resources available through FTP or gopher. The filters may be selected and turned on or off while any upper level sort is in place: a display by resource type, alphabetic list, or subject. This is a powerful design for users, with substantial innovation incorporated into it.